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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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INFORMATION
August 18, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. KISSINGER

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS
APPLY

FROM: Helmut Sonnenfeldt

SUBJECT: Implications of the Indo-Soviet Treaty

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Soviet Intentions

The current interpretation of the treaty is that the Soviets acted primarily to retain the Indians, who were on the verge of recognizing Bangla Desh and therefore ready for war. The Soviets provided Mrs. Gandhi with a dramatic psychological coup, which, in turn relieved her of internal pressure for drastic action. This analysis is being publicized in the New York Times, and through our diplomats (e.g., Sisco's conversation with the Pak Ambassador who disagreed).

While it may be that the Soviets and the Indians revived this old treaty as the solution to a difficult crisis, the major unanswered question is whether the stability thus achieved is temporary or will endure for a long period. Or, put another way, does the new Soviet commitment lead inevitably to further escalation, either by the Paks and Chinese, or through the new confidence gained by New Delhi?

A case can be made that over the longer term what the Soviets have done is extremely dangerous.

First of all, the degree of Soviet commitment is deepened. No matter what the precise terms of the treaty, the Soviets seem obligated to assist Indians militarily, if India is attacked or threatened. In order for the treaty to have the desired deterrent effect on both the Pakistani and Chinese, the Soviets have to interpret the treaty in the strongest terms. Thus, at the discussion of the treaty in the Supreme Soviet prior to its ratification the operative clause was described in a way that seemed to obligate the Soviets to take prompt and effective measures rather than consult.

In addition, to secure their interests and extend their control over Indian policy, the Soviets will have no choice but to be more amenable to Indian requests on the military side. We already learned before the treaty signing that the Soviets had suggested joint maneuvers. Thus, there is a prospect of some increase in Soviet personnel in India and certainly more cooperation in the military side.

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The escalatory aspects of this are obvious: if the Chinese come under pressure from Pakistan to counter the Soviet move, what will they do? If they do nothing the Soviets have made an important gain -- certainly one of their objectives is to expose the Chinese as weak allies. If, on the other hand the Chinese raise the ante, then the Soviets must also respond to maintain their credibility, a credibility which would have to be backed with at least more sophisticated Soviet weaponry, etc.

If we also consider Soviet reaction in light of the Sino-American rapprochement, it becomes even more likely that the Soviets have embarked on a potentially dangerous course. The Indo-Soviet treaty is in some respects a riposte to the US moves toward China. At least the Soviets are implying this in some of their publicity and the Indians make no effort to conceal that their interest in a Soviet commitment grew rapidly in the wake of the China visit announcement.

(As I pointed out in an earlier memorandum, Eastern Europe and the Indian Subcontinent are potentially the two most dangerous and unpredictable areas of Soviet reaction to our China move, even though in direct relations with us the Soviets are likely to continue or perhaps even increase their flexibility.)

Thus, the Indian-Pakistan conflict becomes a sort of Sino-Soviet clash by proxy. In such maneuvering, questions involving loss of face take on much greater importance, and the events of the Ussuri River in 1969 suggest that neither the Chinese nor Soviets are willing to suffer such a loss of face, at least not until the confrontation becomes dangerously acute.

Finally, one must consider what this particular turn in Soviet policy means in perspective. We now have two cases where the USSR, faced with a difficult situation, where it believed its own interests were at stake, responded by deepening its involvement both politically and militarily. In the UAR the Soviets had already broken with their previous prudence and put Soviet forces in the position of being involved in combat outside the Soviet-Warsaw Pact area. While this seemed a temporary expedient and an aberration in Soviet policy, both the UAR and Indian treaties raise some questions about Soviet willingness to fight outside of Eurasia.

We should not leap to any dramatic conclusions, but it is a rather ominous commentary on this aspect of Soviet policy that like the imperialists of the last century, the Soviets feel obliged to extend their commitment to maintain their international position. As many observers have pointed out the most

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dangerous aspect of Soviet policy is the tendency of an oligarchy to compromise rather than withdrawing from overexposed positions. What we may be witnessing therefore is another step in Soviet policy toward invoking its major asset -- military power -- to guarantee its imperialist ambitions.

What to do?

I am not sufficiently versed in the intricacies of the East Pakistan situation to recommend any particular course. From the Soviet angle, however, I doubt the easy assumption that we must open some communication with the Soviets and approach the problems in some parallel or collaborative manner. The Soviets would welcome it only to the extent that it could be used against China, and at this particular point, we cannot go very far in that direction.

On the other hand, we apparently still have a parallel interest with the USSR in avoiding war. If that is still true, then the Soviet commitment to a "political solution" (as used in the Soviet-Indian communique) provides an opening for at least approaching the Soviets to explain what they mean and intend to do about promoting a political solution. Such a dialogue might then be extended to include the Chinese, with the US as a broker, as well as a participant. The objective might be a five power agreement or parallel statement that none of the parties would resort to force. While not a solution, it might be the way to allow the parties to save face and avoid the escalation of words and action that now seems likely.

Cleared with S. Hoskinson.

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